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Author Relives Days of Kennedy Assassination for New Book

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WASHINGTON, May 8—William Manchester, author and former foreign correspondent, is reliving four days most Americans would like to forget—the days between the assassination and funeral of John F. Kennedy.

Mr. Manchester, who was chosen by Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy to write an authoritative history of the assassination, spends at least 12 hours a day poring over material in an unmarked, unadorned office on the fourth floor of the National Archives Building.

A lean man of 42 years, with thinning brown hair, Mr. Manchester works alone in order to protect the confidence of the more than 1,000 persons he has interviewed in the last 15 months.

He had never met Mrs. Kennedy, until she invited him to write the book because her husband had admired his "Portrait of a President," a book about Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Manchester accepted reluctantly.

"No one who remembers those days would willingly relive them," he said recently.

Insists on Terms

He insisted on terms that would preserve his independence. He will accept no official assistance other than the use of the office.

In June, Mr. Manchester, who is the father of three children will give up the office and return to the Wesleyan University Center for Advanced Studies in Middletown, Conn., where he is a permanent fellow, to begin writing.

"My sole concern is to write a thorough, accurate account which will stand up—which will be in libraries and which historians will use as the basic work," he said.

Oswald 'Minor Figure'

A privileged observer at the Warren Commission hearings, Mr. Manchester has collected all his own evidence.

"I have more fresh material than in those 26 volumes," he said, gesturing toward a set of the Warren Report testimony.

"The commission concentrated on identification of the assassin and the question of conspiracy, and it met its mandate superbly," he continued. "But all the questions are not answered when the assassin is identified. Actually, Oswald is a minor figure in the story.

"The assassination was more than a crime, it was a huge thing. Questions must be answered about the transfer of power, about what happened to the establishment of the Federal Government, and to the American people."

Communications, Mr. Manchester noted, made the assassination "the greatest simultaneous experience in American history."

Mr. Manchester's book will begin with a White House reception on Nov. 20, 1963, President Kennedy's last official appearance in Washington. It will end after the funeral six days later.

The book will run about 1,000 pages long and is expected to be published by Harper and Row in three to five years.